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THE FARM PROBLEM IS A NATIONAL PROBLEM

A radio interview between A. W. Manchester, northeastern region, Agricultural Adjustment Administration, and Sam Lassen, South Dakota agricultural conservation committee, broadcast Monday, August 9, 1937, in the Department of Agriculture period, National Farm and Home Hour by NBC and 70 associated stations.

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SALISBURY: Here we are in Washington. And today we have more to tell you about the federal farm program and farm conditions. One of our reporters is from the South Dakota agricultural conservation committee -- Mr. Sam Lassen.

LASSEN: Hello, Farm and Home folks, especially you folks in South Dakota.

SALISBURY: Our other reporter is Mr. A. W. Manchester, who directs the Agricultural Conservation Program in the northeastern states. He's talked with this audience a number of times before. The Pennsylvania State Agricultural Conservation Committee invited Mr. Lassen to speak at their state Triple-A field day last week. There were about 2500 to 3000 people there on the campus of Pennsylvania State College. Mr. Lassen told those Pennsylvanians how South Dakota farmers feel about the national farm program. And today, just before time for him to catch a train for home, Mr. Lassen has come to the studio with Mr. Manchester. I think that takes care of the preliminaries, Mr. Manchester, so you can go right ahead.

MANCHESTER: Thanks, Morse. I got a great deal out of Mr. Lassen's talk up in Pennsylvania and from my conversations with him since then. It's rather hard for us eastern people to appreciate the farm problems of South Dakota and other middle western states.

LASSEN: It works the other way around too, Mr. Manchester. We need to understand the problems of the East.

MANCHESTER: Yes, the same thing applies to all sections of the country. We need to understand each other's problems because we can't solve our own problems without each other's help.

LASSEN: That's right, and I wish that more of us farmers had realized it sooner. Since I went to Washington during the Farmers' March in the spring of 1935, I've realized it more and more. We all learned a lot talking to farmers from other parts of the country. There's an old song that says it about right: "The more we get together, the happier we'll be." But not just in meetings -- I mean we need to get our thoughts together.

MANCHESTER: Our listeners may want to know WHY we think farmers in one region depend so much on farmers in other regions.

LASSEN: Well, let's ask them to remember 1932. In South Dakota and a lot of other states, we had such low grain prices and were so hard up that many farmers used grain for fuel instead of coal. That's what surpluses did for us. We got as low as 5 cents a bushel for oats and barley, 8 to 20 cents a bushel for corn, 2 to 2 1/2 cents a pound for hogs, and so on. We were having hard times, but it wasn't just us folks out there. Practically everybody else was having hard times too. Then in 1933 and 1934 we went to the other extreme. The drought dried us out or burned us out. Prices were better, but we didn't have anything to sell.

MANCHESTER: Yes, Mr. Lassen, we all realize, I think, that those two extremes -- surpluses and then scarcity brought on by drought -- worked a great hardship on farmers in the middle west and northwest. But times are easier now.

LASSEN: Sure. That's right. And just because of better times, some people want to forget about the hard times and the farm problem and maybe even the farmers. But let me tell you, if we are not careful, we'll go right back to hard times like those of 1932.

MANCHESTER: You're speaking of the country as a whole, rather than just your part of the country.

LASSEN: Yes. Of course, at home we think about hard times mostly in terms of wheat, corn, hog, and cattle prices.

MANCHESTER: And in the East we think of it in terms of prices for potatoes, tobacco, milk, eggs, and so on. Your prices and our prices tend to go up and down together. When the western farmer has ruinous prices, it's a pretty safe bet that eastern farmers will get those hard knocks pretty soon. The laboring man thinks of such hard times in terms of wages; the business man in terms of the prices and volume of goods that he has to sell.

LASSEN: Well, it doesn't make any difference just how any one person thinks about hard times for the farmer. We're all thinking about the same problem when you get right down to it.

MANCHESTER: The same problem. Then, what you're getting at is that if all farmers, and other people too, have a mutual problem, they would be wise to work together for a mutual solution to the problem.

LASSEN: That's it. But what I'm saying takes in more people than just farmers. When we farmers can buy what we need and what we want, we make business for industry, and industry makes jobs for labor. When we had the cheapest food prices the country has ever seen, there wasn't much business, and lots of people were out of jobs. When we worked together to get better wheat prices, even though the drought hit the wheat country, we still had enough wheat to feed the nation. Nobody paid too high a price for bread, and certainly nobody complains about the farmer getting too high a price for his wheat. I talked to the wife of a laboring man in South Dakota about the farm program. She was strong for it. In 1932

when she went to a butcher shop to buy meat at a ridiculously low price, she had an empty pocketbook and couldn't buy regardless of the low price. She said in 1936 her husband was employed at fair wages, and now she could buy the necessities of life.

MANCHESTER: You think most consumers are like this lady?

LASSEN: Yes, I do. I think most consumers see that they are well off when the farmers are well off. There's a hopeful sign from the industrial leaders, too. A group of big business men just recently met with farmers out in Iowa to talk about their mutual problems. I understand they agreed that farmers have to make a living in order for business to be any good.

MANCHESTER: Well, Mr. Lassen, this is turning into quite an optimistic report. However, I know you don't think the farm problem is licked.

LASSEN: No sir: I know some people won't even agree with what I'm saying. And some people wouldn't ever agree. There are still people who find it in their own interest to keep farmers from working together. There are people who preach that what is in the interest of grain and livestock farmers is against the interest of your Northeastern dairy and poultry farmers. There's one trouble with the strategy of the people who want to split farmers into sectional groups fighting one another. The farmers in all sections are finding out how much they've got in common with each other. And the general public is realizing how important it is to have a prosperous agriculture.

MANCHESTER: Mr. Lassen, I'd like to add a word to what you said about the general public. When Congress appropriated money to carry on the Agricultural Conservation Program, it said, in effect, that for the general welfare we must protect and improve the soil. Protecting and improving the soil involves better balanced systems of farming.

LASSEN: That's right, Mr. Manchester, and nearly all the farmers I know want to do that. Regardless of where they live, they want to follow balanced systems of farming. They don't want to mine the soil to make a living. They don't want to worry all the time about what next year's surplus will do to them. They want some insurance against the effects of dry weather. They also want the consuming public to have some protection against the bad effects of shortages and gluts.

MANCHESTER: Well, Mr. Lassen, that certainly is one goal of all thinking farmers: better balanced farming and more security. We're happy to learn that farmers in all sections are more and more willing to work together toward that goal.

SALISBURY: Thank you, Mr. Lassen, and Mr. Manchester. Farm and Home listeners, you have just heard Mr. Sam Lassen, a farmer and State Agricultural Conservation committeeman from South Dakota, outlining to Mr. A. W. Manchester, Director of the Northeast Division of the Triple-A, his ideas on the community of interest of farmers generally.

